

Unfinished business: student perspectives on disclosure of mental illness and success in VET — support document

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Table 1: Student participants by site, course and diagnosis

Name, gender/age	Diagnosis	Site	Course
N-F -21 years	Depression	1	Cert IV in Hospitality management
S-F-24 years	Schizoaffective disorder	1	Bachelor of Digital Media
C-F-29 years	Depression	1	Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy
J-F-34 years	Depression	1	Diploma in Welfare
E-F-22 years	Anxiety	1	Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy
A-M-29 years	Depression and Anxiety	1	Bachelor of Communication and Design
C-F-24 years	Depression, PTSD	1	Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Management
SJ-F-27 years	Depression and anxiety	1	Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy
D-M-29 years	Asbergers, Anxiety	2	Certificate III in Network Administration
M -F-57 years	Depression, PTSD, Anxiety	2	Certificate III in Retail
M-M-55 years	Psychotic depression	2	Certificate IV in Welfare
B-F-52 years	Anxiety and depression	2	Certificate III in Retail
A-F-55 years	Depression	2	Certificate III in Visual arts
B-M-26 years	Anxiety, Substance Use disorder	2	Certificate III in Retail
K-M -36 years	Schizophrenia	2	Certificate IV in Information Technology
M-F-45 years	Depression	3	Certificate IV in Welfare
K-F -22 years	Depression and Anxiety	4	Certificate IV in Disability Work
F-F-35 years	Bi polar disorder	4	Diploma in Library Services and Information Technology
V-F-24 years	Psychotic depression	4	Certificate III in Visual Arts
J-F-27 years	Depression	4	Certificate III in Animal Companion Service

Table 2: Staff participants by site and position

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4
Position				
Teacher	2	3	4	
Counsellor	1	2	1	2
Specialist disability staff		1		1
Student support staff	2			1

Research interview questions

Students

- 1 Tell me about the course you have enrolled in? What prompted you to enrol in your course?
- 2 How long do you think it will take to complete your course?
- 3 What might help you pass and complete your course? (prompts— self, others) Tell me about these.
- 4 What might prevent you from passing and finishing your course? (Prompts—self, others). Tell me about these.
- 5 Tell me about your mental illness and the influence it has on your experience of study at XXXX.
- 6 Have you told staff at XXXX about your mental illness? Can you tell me how and when you did this? Can you tell me how you decided who and how much to tell?
- 7 What difference, if any, has this decision made to your experience of study at XXXX?
- 8 Has this been a decision you have been pleased with? Tell me about that?
- 9 The next time you enrolled in a course, what factors would influence your decision to tell or not to tell?

Staff

- 10 What are the factors you believe contribute to successful course completion for VET students with a mental illness?
- 11 What is your view on the role/place of disclosure of mental illness in VET?
- 12 What has been your experience of students disclosing a mental illness?
- 13 What has been your experience of students not disclosing a mental illness?
- 14 We are looking to develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist them in responding to students with mental illness. In thinking about these, what kinds of things would be helpful for you to have in the guidelines?
- 15 Thinking more broadly, what kinds of things might be helpful to some of your colleagues?

Participant information

Summary statement:

Researchers from La Trobe University are investigating the factors affecting successful course completion for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students with a mental illness. This research which has been funded by the National Council for Vocational Education, Research (NCVER) forms a major part of a PhD thesis for the chief investigator, Annie Venville.

The research aims to:

- Increase our understanding of the factors contributing to successful course completions by students with disclosed or non-disclosed mental illness in the TAFE and private VET provider sectors
- Explore the factors influencing decisions about disclosure or non-disclosure of mental illness and their implications for successful or non-successful TAFE course completion
- Understand the role of disclosure of mental illness in the experience of successful and non-successful TAFE course completion
- Develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist in managing key aspects of the student experience, including disclosure.

Who can participate in the interviews?

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are 18 years or over, enrolled at TAFE at Certificate 3 and above, and you have a diagnosed mental illness. You also need to be willing to talk about your experience of student life, mental illness and disclosure or non-disclosure.

How will the information be obtained?

Students will participate in a semi-structured telephone or face to face interview during which they will be asked to answer questions about their experience of mental illness and learning, their experience of disclosure of mental illness or non-disclosure and the role of disclosure in assisting with successful course completions. It is expected that this interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Students will also be asked to take part in a follow-up telephone interview close to the end of their course. This second interview is likely to take no more than 45 minutes. Both interviews will be tape-recorded.

What about confidentiality?

Because we are interested in gaining a better understanding of the factors affecting successful course completion for students with a mental illness, students' words will express this better than we can. Students may therefore be quoted but names will be changed through transcription and stored separately from the audio recording. It is possible that you may recognize words you have used but because all information will be de-identified before being used in any report or publication your anonymity will be protected.

Are there any possible risks if you choose to participate?

While it is unlikely, it is possible that you may experience some emotional distress while talking of your experiences. All care will be taken for this not to occur however you should not participate if you are anxious about this happening. If you do experience any distress, or if you simply want to talk about the process of being interviewed, you may choose to speak with the counsellor at your campus or a counsellor at a local community health service. You will be provided with contact details for these counsellors before the first interview commences and these services are free of charge. You

have the right at all times to interrupt or withdraw from the interview and the study and there will be no effect on any of your relationships with VET staff or access to educational or support services whether you decide to participate or not.

What are the benefits of the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from your participation in this project, but it is possible that the telling of your story may be useful in itself. It is also possible that you and other VET students who have a mental illness will benefit from the greater understanding this study hopes to provide of the factors affecting successful course completion. It is also expected that findings from this study will educate teachers, counsellors and other professionals, ensuring as many people as possible gain benefit from your participation.

What do I do if I am interested in participating?

Simply email Annie Venville at La Trobe University a.venville@latrobe.edu.au or call or SMS her on 0418711409. Annie will email or post you a detailed information sheet that will help you decide if you wish to take part.

Important points to remember:

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw will in no way affect your studies.

If you have any complaints or queries that the investigator has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the secretary, Human Ethics Committee, Research and Graduate Studies Office, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, (Ph: 03 9479 1443 or email humanethics@latrobe.edu.au).

Table 3: Student disclosure patterns by site

Site	1 Private Inner city	2 Public Outback/rural	3 Public Regional	4 Public Outer metro
Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and tick box for help Help provided?	1/8 No	0/7	0/1	2/4 Yes x 1- referred by external agency and disclosure encouraged. Student not comfortable with the reasonable adjustments offered No x 1 (distance education student)
Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and not seek help		2/7		
Disclosure of other condition at enrolment and tick help Help provided?	1/8 Issues of chronic pain-non visible Not from point of enrolment but from in class discussion with teachers	1/7 Severe and visible physical disability. Access issues accommodated	1 Language difficulties Note taker provided	2/4 1 Significant hearing loss- referred by external agency. Provision of note taker assisted non-disclosed mental illness and led to later informal disclosure of mental illness 2 Learning disability- insufficient support offered
Later disclosure of mental illness and effective reasonable adjustment provided	1/8 Assistance to reapply for VISA	3/7 Altered and extended assessment tasks	0	
Later disclosure of mental illness and ineffective reasonable adjustment provided	2/8 Insufficient time allowed		0	
Non disclosure of mental illness at end of study period	4/8	1/7 (contact lost with 3 students, 2 of whom had not disclosed at time of first interview)	1/1	0/4 (contact lost with one student who had not disclosed at time of first interview)

Table 4: Timing, reasons and outcomes of disclosure for students

Name, gender, age	Diagnosis	Disclose at enrolment & request help	Disclose at enrolment & not request help	Later disclosure & help received	Later disclosure & no help received	Reason for disclosure	Reason for non disclosure	Course completion or effective progression	Would disclose in future?
D-M-29 years	Asperger's Anxiety	No		Yes – extension		Obligation – “I need more time”		Yes Completion Required longer time	Maybe
M-F 57 years	Depression PTSD, Anxiety	No		Yes – extension	Yes	Obligation (had to tell something)		Yes Completion	Probably
N-F 21 years	Depression	No		Yes Opportunity to re-apply for visa		Desperation (visa)		No Fail most subjects	Prefer not to
S-F 24 years	Schizoaffective disorder	No					Risk of rejection	Yes Progression	No
K-F 22 years	Depression and Anxiety	No		Yes – extension		Obligation Explain absence		Yes Progression	Probably
F-F 35 years	Bi polar disorder	Yes			Yes	Advocacy – integration of illness into self		Yes Progression	Probably not
M-M 55 years	Psychotic depression		Yes	Altered assess tasks		Advocacy		Yes Completion	Yes
C-F 29 years	Depression	No					Risk- and regret what do you say?	Yes Completion	No
J-F 34 years	Depression	Yes			Yes	Desperation		No Fail most subjects	Probably not
E-F 22 years	Anxiety	No					Risk – not serious enough	Yes Progression	No
M-F 45 years	Depression	No					Risk of rejection	Yes Progression	No

Name, gender, age	Diagnosis	Disclose at enrolment & request help	Disclose at enrolment & not request help	Later disclosure & help received	Later disclosure & no help received	Reason for disclosure	Reason for non disclosure	Course completion or effective progression	Would disclose in future?
A-M 29 years	Depression and Anxiety	No			Yes Extension but too little	Desperation – fear of failure		No-fail one subject	No
V-F 24 years	Psychotic depression	Yes				Desperation – fear of failure		Yes Completion But took 2 years instead of 1	Probably
B-F 52 years	Anxiety and depression	No					Regret – ‘what could anyone do?’	No Fail most subjects	No
C-F 24 years	Depression PTSD	No					Disclosed physical condition	Yes Completion But took 6 years instead of 3	No
SJ-F 27 years	Depression and anxiety	No					Protection of self Risk to reputation	Yes Progression	No
A-F 55 years	Depression	No		Yes		Desperation		Lost contact	
B-M 26 years	Anxiety, Substance	No					Risk to reputation	Lost contact	
K-M 36 years	Use disorder Schizophrenia		Yes				Honesty – “most people already know”	Lost contact	
J-F 27yrs	Depression	No					Risk of rejection	Lost contact	